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PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND MILITARY DRILL: WHAT SHOULD BE OUR POLICY?

A SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

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In a time like this, one responsible for the education of the young must keep his feet firmly planted upon solid ground. Patriotic feeling finds many expressions. The safest and most substantial expression is calm, clear-thinking, indomitable, introspective. "We must not confuse excitement with patriotism, the showy exhibition with real love of country."

The schoolmaster's work is in the present; his vision and reward are in the future. He must help to win a present war; he must plan and work for a future citizenship. A war won at the expense of the next generation would be futile.

We should therefore heed especially the lesson that Britain learned and points out to us: (1) enforce the attendance laws; (2) no exploitation of child labor; (3) more attention to physical education; and (4) what has been insisted upon by educational leaders for ten years is now seen equally by laymen as imperative, viz., educate for state and industrial needs in the name of state preparedness and state efficiency, if not of state salvation. (See quotation below, New York state law.)

This means a different kind of education, a different organization of our schools, a different attitude and temper on the part of

our taxpayers toward public expenditures for schools and school buildings.

But this report has to do especially with physical education and military training or drill. The following is a part of a communication from the United States Bureau of Education read to the School Committee at its meeting on May 1 and subsequently presented to the principals and published in the *Daily Advocate*, May 3, 1917:

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF POLICY

One point I firmly believe should be impressed as strongly as possible on the public mind. That is: no interference with the program of public education should be made except under conditions of most absolute and final necessity.

Should we not bear in mind that the war itself is primarily a concern of this adult generation, and that the schools should be kept as free as possible from any unnecessary diversion from their fundamental task? Serious interruptions to that task cannot fail to burden unfairly the next generation.

Any suggestions for the alteration of the work of the schools should be tested on the point as to whether or not they are educationally desirable.

Let this be the general principle to guide us. As applied to the present need and demand for military training, it means that:

1. We must weigh the need of military training, which rests upon a present political sanction, against physical training, which rests upon a present and future political and educational sanction. "Military training and service are an obligation of citizenship, not of education alone."¹

2. We must therefore define or explain the nature and amount of military training proposed to see if it is valid as education. ("Educational" is a broad term and must never be confined in thought to the schoolroom, the book-learning, and the "three R's.")

3. We must weigh the preparedness of the military training against the preparedness of training in the sciences, the mechanic arts, the social studies, and all else that occurs to mind as of peculiar state (i.e., political) value.

I have used the term "military training" in an inclusive sense. To discuss the three points above, it is necessary to define terms about which one finds some confusion of thought:

The comprehensive term "military education" and the term "military training," which is made more specific by its general use in military treatises

¹ Report of New Jersey Commission on Military Training in High Schools.

and reports, refers to the direct, practical, intensive training which is given to the recruit in the army, or to one who is preparing for actual warfare, as it is now carried on—a form of training which differs widely from that formerly in use. The term “military drill” has long been used to designate the exercises which in former years were intended to train the soldier, and included “training with a musket, manual of arms, and close order formation—in a word, an imitation of the sort of training which a young man receives at the armory when he goes into the militia.” Because of the long use of the term in this way, and of its common acceptance in this sense, its limited application is retained in this report.

I. MILITARY TRAINING OR PHYSICAL EDUCATION ?

In the sense of our definition it can be seen that only a small part of military training should be countenanced in our high schools. Such training is a man’s job. To impose its rigors upon boys defeats its own purpose—to make the boys ultimately fit to be soldiers. Educationally it has the same relation physically as Sanskrit or mathematics of four dimensions in a high school has mentally.

II. WHAT PART OF MILITARY TRAINING IS VALID AS EDUCATION ?

“*Drill.*”—The part of military training that may be called “drill” is another matter. The National Education Association Committee on Military Training objects to “drill” in the following:

We do not favor military drill, using the term as we have defined it, in elementary and secondary schools. If it is claimed to be military training, as it sometimes is, its military results are negligible, as most military authorities assert, and as may easily be determined when its exercises are compared with the vigorous and varied activities of actual training. That military drill gives little stimulus or inspiration for actual service is proved by the small number of cadets who enter the national guard when eligible. As a matter of fact, in the cases of most companies of cadets which have been maintained in schools for many years past, the military purpose has usually been concealed by teachers and ignored by parents, and arguments for their existence have been based upon claims of their general disciplinary value. If words mean anything, the serious, ultimate purpose of military drill must be efficiency in military service, altho this may be remote. There is just as much objection to disguising this purpose, if it exists, as to exaggerating its importance. If its purpose is not a military one, but personal discipline, the term is a misnomer and the word “military” should be omitted.

Military drill has been maintained in the schools of a number of cities of Massachusetts for many years. The opinion of the Special Commission on

Military Education of that state, referred to above, is therefore important. To quote the report: "The overwhelming weight of opinion from school teachers, military experts, officers of the regular army and the militia, and the general public is against military drill. It is generally agreed that the military drill which a boy receives in school is of little or no advantage to him from the point of view of practical soldiering. As far as available evidence goes, drill in the schools has had no beneficial effect in promoting enlistments in the militia except in a few isolated localities."

The ground of their opposition they state by quoting from the New Jersey report:

WILL "DRILL" TRAIN TO HABIT OF OBEDIENCE?

It is sometimes claimed that military training is the best agency for inculcating obedience. But if this claim is carefully considered, it will be found that obedience to military authority is generally unthinking. It is often blind and superficial, not real. During actual war, men willingly undergo training because the work is definitely motivated; but when peace comes and men go into barracks, they feel that there is nothing of value in drill and there is a consequent tendency to evade its requirements. This kind of obedience has been, and may be, secured by similar school methods. It is obedience under restraint. When this is removed, laxity in discipline often follows. *The discipline of the schools aims, not at isolated acts of obedience under special circumstances, but at the habit of obedience to elders and persons in authority. It is a psychological fallacy to suppose that obedience to military authority, obedience exacted under any peculiar circumstances, may automatically be translated into the general habit of obedience.* The same may be said of such qualities as alertness, promptness, industry, truthfulness, etc. It is by no means capable of demonstration that those who have had military training, or been subject to military discipline, are superior to other citizens in the possession of these qualities.

I asked the high-school teachers to report their observations in respect to these matters. "Observed instances" of improvement in punctuality, responsiveness to requests and orders, and orderliness in corridors and halls were asked; not opinions of what the effects should or might be. The company had been in existence only a month.

From these "observed instances" the following results were obtained: (a) four offered favorable evidence; (b) many others commented upon the matter favorably; (c) seventeen reported that they had not observed any evidences of improvement in punctuality, obedience, or orderliness; (d) several noticed an improved physical

bearing, and this is significant. It suggests, if it does not establish, the value of the company to our boys as a means of improving them physically.

Why we favor a high-school military company.—Why then should we support a high-school military company? First, because it is a strongly motivated means of inaugurating a systematic, physical education. Secondly, it trains in certain definite and desirable mental as well as physical reactions that will be mentioned further. Thirdly, it properly meets the inner spiritual and patriotic impulse of our boys to do something for their country. Fourthly, it works. And, as long as our teachers report that obedience on the drill floor does “carry over” to the classroom, let it alone.

In this connection, I quote from Lyman Abbott: “Liberty is voluntary and reasoned obedience to law.” (The word “reasoned” I interpolate.) To inculcate this idea is one of the major aims of democratic education. It implies the recognition of law—society’s general statement of its obligations and inhibitions—higher than any individual group. Any government must have obedient citizens or perish, but the note that differentiates a democracy is that the obedience of its citizens must be voluntary and reasoned, not coerced and unintelligent. Despite the fears of the educational psychologist, I believe in exercises that call for organized, coordinated obedience to leadership. The purpose and phrasing of the New York state revised (1917) law are “to develop correct physical posture and bearing, mental and physical alertness, self-control, disciplined initiative, sense of duty and the spirit of *co-operation under leadership*.”

I believe, therefore, in athletics as the crown and capstone evidence of physical development. I believe that the peculiar mental reaction that can come only in accurate and immediate response to command (or external stimulus) is a worthy aim. We find it pre-eminently in physical and musical education.

In so far, then, as the nature of our military drill conforms to these educational purposes, it should be supported; when it ceases to conform, we should revise ideas.

How much “drill”?—What about the amount of drill? The West Point cadets for seven months of the year “drill” in the

gymnasium forty-five minutes a day. The methods of the director demand vigorous, alert, mental action, but of a different kind from that demanded in the classroom. It usually follows the most brain-wracking classroom study.

A very important point to know about this is that out of the forty-five minutes a very small proportion—only from twelve to fifteen minutes—is devoted to the purely military orders of marching, etc. Every exercise, whether those that are to be continued after graduation under army officers or not, has a physical educational value. Major Koehler, the director, gets the military promptness, alertness, and reaction to command through non-military commands. Physical education is the aim.

Abundant testimony from the highest authorities can be advanced to support the contention that health, strength, vigor, alertness, endurance, self-reliance, and self-control can be taught more effectively by a well-graded course in physical training than by any form of so-called military training.

The superior value of thoro physical training, not only in general, for all the purposes of life, but, what is particularly noteworthy in this discussion, for the specific purpose of preparing men for war, is acknowledged by military authorities.

I insert here the opinion of the secretary of our state board, Honorable Charles D. Hine, in a letter to the Superintendent:

My view is that military training ought to be in the regular course in every high school.

The main thing to be dwelt upon is physical strength, which is gained by exercises of the right kind. The army regulations contain the particular forms of exercise which are necessary for effective service in the army.

Everything which contributes to the strength of body and alertness of mind necessary to service in the army should be a part of the course. An hour a day at least should be given to instruction in this subject.

Military service is one of the duties of a citizen. In the last resort he may be called upon to fight as well as to vote and talk.

Secretary Hine rightly refers to the army regulations for "exercise of the right kind."¹ Therein may be found the kind of military exercises that have an equally great educational sanction. With a few discreet omissions, this, for the present, might well be our manual, even for children of the upper grades.

¹ *Manual of Physical Training, U. S. Army*, Government Printing Office, 1914.

We cannot agree, however, that "an hour a day at least should be given." As we have seen, even West Point does not give so much time. On this matter Major Koehler told us that he thought thirty minutes a day, of which ten might be devoted to the strictly military orders, should be sufficient.

III. SCHOOL: THE MOST IMPORTANT PREPAREDNESS INSTITUTION

But a more valid objection appears when we weigh the preparedness of the military with the preparedness found in our high-school studies.

The amount of time which must be devoted to special military training, whether it is conducted in or out of school hours, must be sufficient to make it of apparent value. *This is bound to interfere with the pupil's progress* in his school course. The pupil of the high school has entered the period when he must choose his career and has begun accordingly to specialize in his studies. He is devoting more time to self-selected study and work. For these all the time he can devote to them properly is needed. The added duty of military training must necessarily divert his attention from his aim of life, and take time which ought to be devoted to preparation for it, and must place too much emphasis on a special activity in which he will probably never be engaged.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AS PREPAREDNESS

In recent years much attention has been devoted to vocational education, which has been encouraged and aided by state and national laws. Military training, by occupying the time and diverting the attention of the pupils, will greatly interfere with its development and operation.

New York State, whose lawmakers went into the matter rather precipitately, saw the force of this, so that their 1917 revision provides that

such requirement as to military training, herein prescribed may in the discretion of the commission be met in part by such vocational training or vocational experience as will, in the opinion of the commission, *specifically* prepare boys of the ages named for service *useful to the state*, in the maintenance of defense, in the promotion of public safety, in the conservation and development of the state's resources, or in the construction and maintenance of public improvements.

Other opinion on this point has been expressed by Professor Willis R. Whitney, member of the United States Naval Consulting Board, in *Yale Review*, April, 1917. He says:

A boundless opportunity for unlimited national *preparedness* lies in education, and this simple word describes our only sure way. If the education of our military camps, or if the manual of arms were a criterion, preparation would be the product of a few weeks' pleasant outing. . . . But real preparedness is less narrow, and must be shared by many who never bear arms at all.

A high-school course in preparedness includes then nearly everything offered in the scientific-preparatory, the industrial arts, and the commercial courses. A brief consideration of the Connecticut Industrial Census questions will make this clear to anyone. Can one keep books for the Quartermaster Corps? Can one operate a wireless? dress a wound? cook for camp or for a convalescent soldier? run an automobile? draw a plan? read a blue-print? grow vegetables and till a plot of ground?

Our duty, therefore, is to emphasize, with all our powers of persuasion, that the conventional military drill for boys is relatively but a small part of patriotic preparedness and service. Every boy and girl in Stamford High School should be assigned to a division or course of work where he may be directly conscious of his part in national preparedness.

Our military enterprise, therefore, should not interfere with the more important industrial preparedness.

SUMMARY

The high-school military company.—We are keeping in mind these principles in connection with the high-school military company: (1) possible future enlistment or conscription of the older boys; (2) more rigorous work for boys over eighteen and physically strong; (3) consent of the parents before requiring exercises more arduous and exacting than the legitimate physical exercises; (4) athletics not to interfere as an additional physical activity; (5) duplication of activities to be discouraged; e.g., Boy Scouts are to give their first allegiance to their own organization.

Physical welfare.—In addition to the need of physical education, including sensible proportions of military drill, we should strengthen

our teaching of: (1) personal hygiene; (2) community hygiene and sanitation; (3) disease prevention; (4) patriotic and civic service.

These very important matters are found in our new community civics course of study. This study is now required by Connecticut state law.

In this connection, I suggested in the *Annual Report* of 1916, page 49, the desirability of co-ordinating the local agencies for health conservation.

To summarize:

1. The war presents no new problems to the schools; it rather indicates the old problems upon which to place our emphasis.
2. The emphasis should be placed especially upon physical and vocational education.
3. In placing such emphasis there should be "no interference with the program of public education."
4. Military training has no place in the public schools.
5. Military drill (*a*) is a small part of military training; (*b*) it cannot be justified upon the grounds of inculcating habits of obedience, alertness, promptness, industry, etc.; (*c*) it can be justified, however, upon the grounds of physical exercise and of "co-operation under leadership." For these reasons we should also indorse supervised athletics in which all may participate.
6. The amount of drill, however, bears a very small proportion of the time that should be devoted to physical exercise.
7. About half an hour a day should be devoted to physical exercises, including those exercises that are peculiarly military.
8. The most important emphasis, however, should be "specifically to prepare for service useful to the state."
9. Every pupil should be assigned "to do his bit" so that he may be directly conscious of his part in national preparedness.